

DAILY DEVOTIONS

Monday, March 15 – It Is Written

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. John 20:31

“The Lord is my high tower We left the camp singing.” On September 7, 1943, ETTY HILLESUM wrote those words on a postcard and threw it from a train. Those were the final recorded words we would hear from her. On November 30, 1943, she was murdered at Auschwitz. Later, HILLESUM’S diaries of her experiences in a concentration camp were translated and published. They chronicled her perspectives on the horrors of Nazi occupation along with the beauty of God’S world. Her diaries have been translated into sixty-seven languages—a gift to all who would read and believe the good as well as the bad.

The apostle John didn’t sidestep the harsh realities of Jesus’ life on earth; he wrote of both the good Jesus did and the challenges He faced. The final words from his gospel give insight into the purpose behind the book that bears his name. Jesus performed “many other signs . . . which are not recorded” (20:30) by John. But these, he says, were “written that you may believe” (v. 31). John’S “diary” ends on the note of triumph: “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.” The gift of those gospel words allows us the opportunity to believe and “have life in his name.”

The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) are diary accounts of God’S love for us. They’re words to read and believe and share, for they lead us to life. They lead us to Christ.

PRAYER:

Gracious Father, thank You for the gift of the Scriptures, written down by faithful hands so that I might believe and have life. Amen.

Tuesday, March 16 – My Plead

I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures. . . . So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition. Galatians 2:20

A family's prayer time ended with a surprising announcement one morning. As soon as Dad said, "Amen," five-year-old Kaitlyn proclaimed, "And I prayed for Logan, because he had his eyes open during prayer."

I'm pretty sure praying for your ten-year-old brother's prayer protocol isn't what Scripture has in mind when it calls us to intercessory prayer, but at least Kaitlyn realized that we can pray for others.

Bible teacher Oswald Chambers emphasized the importance of praying for someone else. He said that "intercession is putting yourself in God's place; it is having His mind and perspective." It's praying for others in light of what we know about God and His love for us.

We find a great example of intercessory prayer in Daniel 9. The prophet understood God's troubling promise that the Jews would have seventy years of captivity in Babylon (Jeremiah 25:11-12). Realizing that those years were nearing their completion, Daniel went into prayer mode. He referenced God's commands (Daniel 9:4-6), humbled himself (v. 8), honored His character (v. 9), confessed sin (v. 15), and depended on His mercy as he prayed for His people (v. 18). And he got an immediate answer from God (v. 21).

Not all prayer ends with such a dramatic response, but be encouraged that we can go to God on behalf of others with an attitude of trust and dependence on Him.

PRAYER:

Father, help me to know You better so that when I pray for others, I can filter my requests through my knowledge of Your will. Amen.

Wednesday, March 17 – Who Knows?

When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other. *Ecclesiastes 7:14*

According to Chinese legend, when Sai Weng lost one of his prized horses, his neighbor expressed sorrow for his loss. But Sai Weng was unconcerned. He said, “Who knows if it may be a good thing for me?” Surprisingly, the lost horse returned home with another horse. As the neighbor congratulated him, Sai Weng said, “Who knows if it may be a bad thing for me?” As it turned out, his son broke his leg when he rode on the new horse. This seemed like a misfortune, until the army arrived at the village to recruit all able-bodied men to fight in the war. Because of the son’s injury, he wasn’t recruited, which ultimately could have spared him from death.

This is the story behind the Chinese proverb which teaches that a difficulty can be a blessing in disguise and vice versa. This ancient wisdom has a close parallel in Ecclesiastes 6:12, where the author observes: “Who knows what is good for a person in life?” Indeed, none of us know what the future holds. An adversity might have positive benefits, and prosperity might have ill effects.

Each day offers new opportunities, joys, struggles, and suffering. As God’s beloved children, we can rest in His sovereignty and trust Him through the good and bad times alike. God has “made the one as well as the other” (7:14). He’s with us in all the events in our lives and promises His loving care.

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for ordering my life. Help me to praise You in both good and bad times, believing that You work all things for the ultimate good of those who love You. Amen.

Thursday, March 18 – Weather Changes Things

He says to the snow, “Fall on the earth,” and to the rain shower, “Be a mighty downpour.” *Job 37:6*

Named for a tough blue-collar neighborhood in Cincinnati, Ohio, the grassroots musical group *Over the Rhine* sings about a transformation that took place each year in the city. “Whenever we’d get our first real snowfall of the year, it felt like something sacred was happening,” explains band co-founder Linford Detweiler. “Like a little bit of a fresh start. The city would slow down and grow quiet.”

If you’ve experienced a heavy snowfall, you understand how it can inspire a song. A magical quietness drapes the world as snow conceals grime and grayness. For a few moments, winter’s bleakness brightens, inviting our reflection and delight.

Elihu, the one friend of Job who may have had a helpful view of God, noted how creation commands our attention. “God’s voice thunders in marvelous ways,” he said (Job 37:5). “He says to the snow, ‘Fall on the earth,’ and to the rain shower, ‘Be a mighty downpour.’ ” Such splendor can interrupt our lives, demanding a sacred pause. “So that everyone he has made may know his work, he stops all people from their labor,” Elihu observed (vv. 6-7).

Nature sometimes seizes our attention in ways we don’t like. Regardless of what happens to us or what we observe around us, each moment—magnificent, menacing, or mundane—can inspire our worship. The poet’s heart within us craves the holy hush.

PRAYER:

Father, help me to see Your hand in everything today. Give me a heart to appreciate Your amazing works. Amen.

Friday, March 19 – Out of Poverty

They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on. Mark 12:44

Warren Buffett and Bill and Melinda Gates made history when they launched the **Giving Pledge**, promising to donate half of their money. As of 2018, this meant giving away 92 billion dollars. The pledge made psychologist Paul Piff curious to study giving patterns. Through a research test, he discovered that the poor were inclined to give 44 percent more of what they had than wealthy people. Those who've felt their own poverty are often moved to greater generosity.

Jesus knew this. Visiting the temple, He watched the crowds drop gifts into the treasury (Mark 12:41). The rich tossed in wads of cash, but a poor widow pulled out her last two copper coins, worth maybe a penny, and placed them into the basket. I picture Jesus standing up, delighted and astounded. Immediately, He gathered His disciples, making sure they didn't miss this dazzling act. "This poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others," Jesus exclaimed (v. 43). The disciples looked at each other, bewildered, hoping someone could explain what Jesus was talking about. So, He made it plain: those bringing huge gifts "gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything" (v. 44).

We may have little to give, but Jesus invites us to give out of our poverty. Though it may seem meager to others, we give what we have, and God finds great joy in our lavish gifts.

PRAYER:

Father, I don't feel like I have much to offer. My gifts feel puny and worthless. But I'm here. All of me. Will You receive me in my poverty? Amen.

Saturday, March 13 – Practice

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice.

Philippians 4:9

Some years ago I was helping our daughter with her math homework, it was apparent she was less than enthusiastic about doing multiple problems related to the same concept. “I’ve got it, Dad!” he insisted, hoping I would let him out of doing all of his assignment. I then gently explained to him that a concept is just a concept until we learn how to work it out in *practice*.

Paul wrote about practice to his friends in Philippi. “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice” (Philippians 4:9). He mentions five things: *reconciliation*—as he urged Euodia and Syntyche to do (vv. 2-3); *joy*—as he reminded his readers to cultivate (v. 4); *gentleness*—as he urged them to employ in their relation to the world (v. 5); *prayer*—as he had modeled for them in person and in writing (vv. 6-7); and *focus*—as he had shown even in prison (v. 8). Reconciliation, joy, gentleness, prayer, and focus—things we’re called to live out as believers in Jesus. Like any habit, these virtues must be practiced in order to be cultivated.

But the good news of the gospel, as Paul had already told the Philippians, is that “it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (2:13). We’re never practicing in our own power. God will provide what we need (4:19).

PRAYER:

Father, give me the grace to practice Your ways by the power of the Holy Spirit. Empower me to live my life in a way that bears the fruit of the Spirit. Amen.

Sunday, March 14 – Reminded

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. 1 Peter 2:9

Charles Swindoll said: “Sometimes it's encouraging just to thumb through the Scriptures and find all the promises that tell us what God thinks of us, especially in a world where folks are continually telling us all the things they have against us and all the things they see wrong with us.”

Life can be discouraging sometimes. We all face criticism from people we love; we face times when we don't feel good enough to fill the many roles we have in life.

In those times of discouragement, turning to the Word of God is the best remedy. It reminds us who we are in Christ. Scripture is filled with verses that tell us what God thinks of us: He chose us to be the first fruits of His creation (James 1:18). He loved us so much He gave His Son to be the sacrifice for our sins (John 3:16). He marks us as His own by giving us the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13) He made us fearfully and wonderfully; all His works are wonderful (Psalm 139:14). His grace is sufficient for us; His power is perfected in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

If we tune our hearts to what God says about us - and not what other people say about us, what the devil says about us, or what we say about ourselves - encouragement is sure to follow!

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for loving me and saving me from my sins. Help me to turn to You when I am discouraged and find comfort in Your Word. I am so glad that You knew me and called me even before I was conceived in my mother's womb. According to Your Word, I am no mistake; therefore, I ask You to help me start looking at my life with respect, esteem, and honor. You called me, and You have an awesome plan for my life. I ask You to help me uncover that plan so I can get started on the road of obedience toward the fulfillment of what You brought me into this world to do! In Jesus' Name, I pray, Amen.